never saw the sun shining so bright

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by brianmaybrianmay

Summary

Five kisses that Bucky stole from Buck, and one kiss that Buck stole in return.

Notes

Thank you for reading this was one of the first ideas I had for them, but other ideas kept getting in the way, and so it's nice to finally finish this!

As always, this is based on the MoTA characters, and no disrespect meant to the real men.

Chapter 1: chapter one

1.

Looking back over his shoulder, Gale couldn't help the smile that crawled onto his face at the sight of John dancing with Marge's friend, June.

It was a Sunday night, and while Bennett's Bar wasn't usually high up on his list of places that he liked to spend his Sunday nights, he could make an exception for tonight; since John was shipping out first thing in the morning.

This was exactly what they'd all been waiting for.

It had been three years since he'd first joined the Army Air Force, six months since and John had both been transferred to the 100th bomb group, and now the moment they'd all been waiting for was finally here. Of course, he wouldn't actually be shipping out for another two to three weeks, but the fact that John was shipping out tomorrow signalled the start of this whole thing.

John had recently been promoted to Air Executive for their unit, which was the reason that he was shipping out earlier than the rest of them. As proud as he was of John for that, he knew that there was a part of the older man that was less than pleased with the promotion. As Air Exec, he knew that John would be flying a lot less frequently than the rest of them, and as a result, it would take him far longer to get through his tour.

Maybe John would be the best person for the job, and maybe he wouldn't, but part of him couldn't help but feel that John would be wasted as Air Exec. He was one of the best pilots he'd ever seen; he had a natural talent behind the controls of a B-17, and he'd been stellar in every aspect of their training. It almost seemed a shame that he'd be stuck in an office job for the majority of their time deployed.

Still, John hadn't said too much about it, and so he wouldn't either.

"They make a nice pair, don't they?" Marge said after a moment, drawing his attention back to her, "Oh, I should have introduced them earlier."

"He's leaving tomorrow." He pointed out.

Still, he couldn't deny that John and June made for a good-looking pair. John was tall and handsome, with sharp cheekbones and an even sharper smile. He had the charming personality to go with his good looks too, without coming across as overly arrogant. June was pretty and petite, and her long, dark hair went well with John's own dark hair. They did make a nice pair, he couldn't deny that much.

Marge just shrugged, "Everyone needs someone to write to back home."

"I don't know if John Egan's the pen-pal type." He admitted with a shrug of his own, glancing back towards John and June again.

He wasn't sure how true that was, but he didn't want June to get her hopes up about it either. John had a bit of a reputation as a ladies man, and so he wouldn't be surprised if he never thought about her again after tonight. He didn't mean that as a dig against John, he genuinely didn't, he'd just never known John to be the type to settle down with a girl.

John had done his fair share of dating, and flirting, and sleeping around, but he'd always joked that the longest relationship he'd ever had in his life was the one he had with Gale, and that he'd never make a girl try and contend with the fact that he already had a man in his life.

It was something that was guaranteed to get a laugh from the other guys, especially when John would punctuate it by throwing an arm around his neck to drag him close. It didn't bother him, he was well used to John hanging out of him by now, and so he'd simply smile and roll his eyes every time that it happened.

He knew it wasn't anything to raise eyebrows among the rest of the guys, either. It was common knowledge by now that he and John came as a pair, and that they were generally joined at the hip. It had been a long time since he'd seen somebody be taken aback by how close he and John actually were.

They'd always been like that, right from the very beginning. He was Gale, and John was Bucky, until their first day of basic training, when John had given him his name and had decided that he was Buck; forever sealing the deal that they came as a pair.

On the subject of John not being the pen-pal type, though, John had jokingly promised him that he'd write to him once he safely landed in England. He hadn't exactly taken him seriously, though, and so he

wasn't about to hold out hope. Besides, even if he did, he doubted the letter would actually reach him in time before he shipped out too.

Still, a tiny part of him wouldn't actually mind if John did write to him.

It would be nice to get written confirmation that John had reached England safely and that he was getting on okay with his duties as Air Exec. Aside from that, though, he rather liked the idea of John thinking of him and deciding to write him a letter. Maybe it was silly, because he knew that it probably wouldn't happen, but he couldn't help the tiny part of him that secretly hoped for it.

Speaking of letters, he'd already written one to Marge, one that he planned on leaving behind for her after he'd shipped out. He was under no impressions that it was going to be easy to leave her behind, not when he knew that it was a possibility that he might not make it home to her at all.

Still, there was no use in dwelling on that before he'd even left, though, and so he simply leaned down to press his forehead against hers, quietly whispering that he'd miss her every second that he was gone.

His attention was drawn when one of the other guys, Douglass he guessed, called their names, "Buck, Marge. Hey, you lovebirds, we're toasting Bucky over here."

He turned back to where the rest of the guys were gathered with John to make their toasts, raising his glass to him with a smile when he caught his eye. Like he'd said, he wasn't completely sure that John was the best person for the role of Air Exec, but he was still so damn proud of him for the promotion.

"Hear, hear, Major Egan."

"To our new Air Exec, Bucky."

"Of all the drunks in the 100th."

John laughed, holding up his own glass, "Well, someone's gotta make a nest for the rest of you dodos." He teased, before draining the liquor in his glass.

Well, when he looked at it that way, maybe John would actually be suited to the job. Aside from being a natural leader, he'd always been

the mothering type; the first to take the younger guys under his wing and make sure they were taken care of. Maybe he *would* actually do a decent job of setting up a nest for the rest of them.

"Cheers, Major."

"To the 100th."

"Yeah, to the 100th."

Later on that evening, he smiled as he leaned against the table he was stood next to, watching John throw darts at the dartboard across from them.

They'd seen the girls off not too long ago, Marge wrapping John in a tight hug and making him promise to look after himself over there. It was nice to see, really. He was glad that John and Marge were so friendly with each other, but he'd never had to worry about them being alone together either. He knew that John had enough respect for both of them to never try it on with Marge; even in a joking manner. He'd never even seen him teasingly flirt with her.

He'd been planning to call it a night too once they'd seen the girls off, but John had draped an arm around his neck and had pleaded with him to stay for a while longer.

I could die before you get over there. How would you live with yourself knowing you'd denied me one last night? John had asked, a grin turning up the corners of his lips.

He knew he was only teasing, and chances were that he'd be fine, but he couldn't help the niggling anxiety that had risen in him since learning that John would actually be flying missions before he and the rest of the guys joined him in England.

It was only two or three weeks, but he had assumed that John would have both feet firmly on the ground until the rest of them got there. He supposed he should have known better, though; if anybody was going to talk their way into flying missions before they were officially supposed to, then he knew it would be John. He'd always been charming enough to get what he wanted without much persuasion.

Well, don't you die on me before I get over there. He had said when John had broken the news, his voice light and teasing, but raising his eyebrows to show that he meant it. No matter what happened when they were over there, the most important thing was that John kept

himself out of trouble - as much as possible anyway, knowing John.

Don't count on it. John had said, still wearing that same sharp grin.

So, he'd agreed to stay for a while longer, letting John beat him in a game of darts while they started on a new round of drinks.

Not many of the guys had stuck around, instead choosing to move on to Slooter's. He was rather surprised that John hadn't gone with them, but John had simply shook his head and insisted that he was flying early tomorrow.

He didn't mind, if he was being honest. There had been quite a big group of them earlier, but it had since dwindled down to just the two of them and a handful of others, and so for the last half an hour, he'd had John's full attention, for the most part.

He rather liked it that way, he wasn't about to deny that much. He'd never ask for it, though, and that was just one of many ways that he and John were complete opposites.

Whenever John wanted attention, he'd never shied away from asking for it; or demanding it, even. He'd lean heavily against his side, throwing an arm around his shoulder, pouting at him until he gave him his full attention.

For a man that was taller than six foot, John was unusually good at putting on the neglected puppy dog act when he didn't get what he wanted; and he caved every single time. Still, like he'd said, he really didn't mind it. He never begged for attention the same way that John did, but he couldn't deny the warm feeling that curled in him whenever he held John's full attention.

Being around John was like staring into the goddamn sun at times. He was loud, he was charming, he was outgoing, and it was impossible not to like him. Sometimes, he still wondered what it was about him that John had latched onto back when they'd been in basic training. He was quiet, he was reserved, everything that John wasn't, and yet John had still picked him out of everybody that they'd trained with.

Even tonight, John had grinned and said *I am amazed that we're friends. You don't drink, you don't gamble, you don't even like sports*. As though he wasn't the one who had picked him out and decided that they'd be friends.

Still, he didn't spend too long thinking about it either. He knew he just

had to consider himself lucky; and he did, every damn day.

"So, what time are you wheels up tomorrow?" He asked, once John had thrown his last dart and had turned back to him.

John shrugged, plucking the darts from the dartboard and handing them to him, "I've gotta be on base for oh-six-hundred."

"Early start."

"I've had worse." John said with a smile.

He did have to admire John, honestly. He was always the last man standing when they were out at a bar, he was always the person who'd insist on getting up to sing, and yet, he was so dedicated when it came to his flying.

Sure, it wasn't unusual for him to show up hungover, or still slightly drunk from the night before, but he always showed up; and that was the main thing.

"Are you nervous?" He asked, toying with the darts in his hands rather than going back to the game. He knew that neither of them were keeping score anyway, other than the fact that he was letting John win.

John hesitated for a moment before answering, "I'm not *not* nervous." He admitted, shrugging again, "I wish you guys were flying in with me."

"Yeah, me too."

John just smiled warmly at him, the action making something twist in his stomach.

That was something that he couldn't let himself think too hard about. He was a man, he had the best girl in the world, he was a Major in the Air Force; he shouldn't feel goddamn butterflies in his stomach just because of a soft smile from his best friend.

He couldn't help it, though. He'd never been able to help it when it came to John.

How many times had he been out at a bar with John, and had watched girls fall in love with him over the course of the night, only to move on and never see him again? It was impossible not to fall at

least a little bit in love with John, and he'd seen that time and time again from people who hardly even knew him.

He should've known that there was never any hope for him. John was flirty with everybody, and that certainly didn't exclude him. He couldn't even begin to count the amount of times that John had brushed playful fingers against his cheek, his jaw, the corner of his mouth, or had leaned his chin on his shoulder as he'd leaned in close to him.

Stronger men than him would probably have been able to keep it from actually turning into something, but he'd never had any willpower when it came to John.

Still, he didn't think of it as an issue, or as something that needed to be squashed. Sure, he refused to put a name to it, and he certainly kept it to himself, but he didn't shy away from accepting the fact that he had feelings for his best friend.

Maybe that was why he was so unwilling to let John go after tonight. Sure, it would only be a couple of weeks before he joined him, but he couldn't deny the tiny part of him that worried about John flying without him. What if tonight was the last time he ever saw John?

He knew he couldn't let himself think like that, though, and so he simply turned back to the dartboard, taking his turn at throwing the darts.

"Are *you* nervous?" John asked after a moment, his voice slightly muffled from the way he was chewing on an ice cube.

"About what?"

John just shrugged, "I don't know, all of it."

He nodded, shrugging his own shoulders, "Yeah, I mean.. who knows what could happen once we get over there."

He knew there was no point in trying to guess what would happen. He and John had both excelled in every aspect of their training, but it really was just luck of the draw. Their very first mission could be their last, there really was no way of predicting it.

"Hey, we'll be fine. You know that, right?" John said, trailing back over to him to gently knock their shoulders together.

"Yeah, I know." He said with a nod, before sighing, "Can't help but worry about you off gallivanting before I even get there, though." He teased, a smile pulling at his lips.

John laughed softly, draping his arm around his neck, "I promise to keep out of trouble."

"I'll believe that when I see it."

"Hey, I promise." John said with a grin, before leaning in to press a hard **kiss** to his cheek.

He couldn't help but smile then, ducking his head to hide the flush that he knew had risen on his cheeks.

As clingy as John could be, he didn't usually push it that far. He was fond of putting his arm around him to drag him close, leaning heavily on his shoulder, but he couldn't remember the last time that John had actually kissed him.

Still, it wasn't something worth dwelling on. The kiss had been quick and playful, and John was probably closer to drunk than sober right now, and so he knew there was no point in wondering what it had meant, or if it had meant anything at all.

John just grinned at him, seemingly pleased with the fact that he'd made him blush, although he did take pity on him, "Come on, give me those back." He said, reaching for the darts, "And if I win this round, you're buying me another drink."

He huffed softly, rolling his eyes, "Don't count on it."

Chapter 2: chapter two

2.

"One down, twenty-four to go."

He smiled, shaking his head at Blakely's words, "Can't start counting 'em already, wait a few more missions for that."

"Come on, don't act like you're not doing the same thing." Blakely teased, sending him a quick grin before heading back to the table, leaving him alone at the bar.

They had just come back from their first mission, and honestly? It wasn't what he'd been expecting at all. Aside from the fact that they'd lost three forts and thirty men in the blink of an eye, they hadn't even dropped a single bomb on their target.

He was pretty sure that he was still in a bit of shock, actually. He'd known that they'd be risking their lives the minute they took off into the air, but he just hadn't anticipated how *easily* lives would be lost. Thirty men, just.. gone.

He knew how lucky they all were to have made it back, but he couldn't help the touch of bitterness he felt at the fact that it had been for nothing. Like he'd said, they hadn't dropped a single bomb.

He knew he'd been short with John when he'd come to pick him up from his fort with the intention of bringing him to interrogation. He hadn't meant to be, he was just annoyed that John hadn't told him what it was like up there. He'd already flown two missions, he knew what it was like; how easily it could all go to shit, and yet, he'd said nothing.

Still, just before he'd left him at interrogation, John had gently squeezed his elbow, a faintly concerned frown crossing his face, and he'd felt the anger seeping out of him.

He knew that John was only trying to protect him, and so he wasn't actually angry with him, he'd just been caught off guard by what it was actually like up there. Still, like John had said, he knew now.

Afterwards, he'd been to see Dickie in the medical hut, and Curt had asked him to come drinking with himself, John, and the rest of the

guys. He'd turned down the offer at first, but the more he'd thought about it afterwards, he figured that joining them for a while wouldn't be the worst thing.

It didn't have to be a wild night, he'd just go for an hour or so, just to spend a bit of time with the guys.

So, he'd headed out to the local bar after he'd eaten and had cleaned himself up, and it had almost been worth changing his mind just to see the way that John had raised his arms and cheered when he'd caught sight of him.

He'd be the first to admit that he wasn't a huge fan of spending his evenings in a bar; he didn't drink, he didn't particularly like to dance. One thing he did enjoy, though, was just sitting back and watching John in this sort of environment.

It was no surprise that John had always loved being the center of attention, and even more so when he'd had a couple of drinks. Still, though, part of him wondered if it was all for show, for the sake of the rest of the guys.

It wasn't hard to see that today's mission had been pretty disheartening for a lot of the men, and a lot of them had still been very quiet by the time he'd showed up at the bar. Over the course of the evening, though, John's loud and brash attitude had drawn smiles and laughter from them, until the atmosphere had finally lifted. He wasn't surprised, really, considering John's tendency to be a mother hen.

It was nice, though, he knew that the guys had needed it.

Right now, he was smiling as he watched John from across the bar, watching him flirt with one of the women who worked at the bar; Lil, he was pretty sure her name was.

Apparently John had charmed his way into her good books during the few weeks he'd been here by himself, but he didn't seem to be having a whole lot of luck with her tonight. Still, John clearly wasn't letting it get to him; still smiling, even as she rolled her eyes at him.

His attention was drawn away from John when a shoulder brushed against his own, and he glanced over to see a man sending him a smile.

He just smiled back, nodding quickly, before turning back towards the

bar.

"Are you with the rest of those Army boys?"

He looked back at the man, before nodding, "Uh, yeah, they're my buddies."

The man nodded, before holding out a hand to him, "Mike."

"Gale." He said, shaking Mike's hand.

He wasn't all too sure what Mike wanted with him. He had an English accent, but he wasn't wearing a uniform, and so he was sure it was a pretty safe guess to assume that he wasn't an RAF pilot. Still, he was friendly enough, and so he didn't mind some small talk while he waited on the round of drinks he was buying.

"You a pilot?" Mike asked, leaning heavily on the bar.

"Yeah, just off the back of our first mission." He said with a smile, "We got here last week."

Mike nodded, "Yeah, I guessed you were new. I would've remembered seeing you around."

He huffed softly, surprised at Mike's words.

That was.. not really what he was expecting. He wasn't all too sure what to make of it, either. The words themselves sounded an awful lot like flirting, but he was sure that that wasn't the case. They were in a crowded bar, surrounded by both civilians and the rest of his unit; flirting with him like this would've been risky as hell.

"I mean it, where on Earth did they get you from?" Mike asked with a grin, leaning in slightly closer to him.

"Yeah, alright."

He wasn't really sure what he was supposed to say, or do. He tended to keep to himself, so he wasn't usually on the receiving end of flirting when he was at a bar, and especially not from a man. He could smell the whisky on his breath as he'd leaned closer to him, though, and so he guessed that the only reason he was being so forward was probably because he was drunk.

It wasn't in his nature to be rude, though, and Mike hadn't actually done anything untoward, and so he wasn't about to make a big deal of

it. If he was being honest, John tended to flirt with him like that on a regular basis, and he'd never thought anything of it.

Still, his less than enthusiastic response didn't seem to deter Mike, and he leaned in even closer to him, their elbows knocking together where they were resting on the bar, "Can I get you a drink?" He asked.

"I've already ordered." He pointed out, nodding towards where the barman was getting together the various drinks that he'd ordered for himself and the guys.

"Come on, just one." Mike insisted, "A whisky, beer. Whatever you want."

He shook his head, "No, thanks. I don't drink."

Maybe that would come across as a lie, intended as a way of getting Mike to back off, but it was the truth. Besides, like he'd said, he'd already ordered drinks, and so he wasn't about to ask Mike to get him a soda, just to placate him.

"How about a cigarette then?" Mike asked.

"I said no." He said, letting a hint of firmness seep into his voice. He'd been willing to be polite about turning Mike down, but it seemed that the other man wasn't getting the hint.

Thankfully, the barman brought his tray of drinks to him then, and so he simply glanced at Mike one last time before heading back to the table with the tray of drinks.

He wasn't quite sure what to make of what had just happened, but one thing he did know was that he was relieved for the fact that Mike hadn't followed him over to the table. He could tell that the other man was drunk, and so he'd been half expecting him to.

Still, he tried to put the whole encounter out of his head as he rejoined the table, leaving the tray of drinks in the middle as he dropped back into his seat.

"How long d'you guys think it'll be before we go up there again?" Crank asked, glancing around the table at the rest of them.

"Jesus, Crank. Eager?" Friedkin asked.

Crank just rolled his eyes, "Come on, don't tell me you're not?"

He couldn't speak for the rest of the guys, but he knew that he personally was eager to get back up there. Maybe *eager* was the wrong word, but he felt as though behind the controls of a B-17 was where he belonged.

He'd always wanted to be a pilot, and he'd had every intention of training to be a fighter pilot, but once he'd actually gotten up there, he couldn't help the way he'd fallen in love with the B-17s. There was something about the size, the power behind them. There really was nothing like flying one, and he knew that a lot of the guys here felt the same way. It was exactly why he'd joined up before the war.

"Well, we all know that Buck here can't wait. True American pilot, this one." DeMarco teased, gently slapping him on the shoulder.

He huffed and rolled his eyes, "I'm just doing my job." He insisted. In saying that, it was definitely a job that he felt he was born to do.

"And he's modest, ain't that something." John teased from behind him, obviously having joined the table again while he wasn't watching.

He glanced back, offering John a smile when he draped his arm over the back of his chair.

"Strike out?" Crank asked, sending a grin in John's direction.

John just laughed, rolling his eyes, "Like you wouldn't believe." He admitted, although he still didn't look too put out about the whole thing.

He gave John a quick smile as he sank into the seat next to him, their shoulders almost pressed together with how close he was. He could feel the heat radiating off of John, and despite the dimmed lights of the bar, he could see the flush on his cheeks and the brightness in his eyes, conveying the fact that he was less than sober right now. Still, he was in good spirits, and that was what mattered.

"Who was your friend?" John asked once the conversation had turned away from them, nodding back towards the bar.

He shook his head, "No one. Civilian."

He and John were so goddamn close, but he didn't particularly want to admit that Mike had just been so openly flirting with him. It wasn't like he'd been flirting back, and even if he had been, it wasn't anything to do with John, but he still just.. he didn't like the idea of

talking about it with John, and he knew that that had everything to do with his own feelings for John.

Thankfully, John didn't push the matter, choosing instead to just gently clink the edge of his glass against his own, before turning back towards the table.

Honestly, as much as he hadn't been too keen on the idea of coming over to the bar tonight, he was glad now that he'd changed his mind.

These guys were some of the best friends he'd ever had, and part of him knew that he should spend as much time with them as he could during their downtime; now that they were officially up flying missions.

Today, they'd found out the hard way of how easy it was to lose men when they were up in the air. He hadn't been particularly close to Adams, Schmalenbach, or Pietrich, but he still felt their loss, as well as the loss of their crews. He couldn't imagine what it would feel like once they lost somebody that he was actually close to; and he certainly wasn't naive enough to believe that that wouldn't happen.

So, for as long as he could, he was going to simply treasure every minute that he got to spend with the guys.

He was going to treasure the way that Curt loudly cackled in response to a joke that Douglass told. He was going to treasure the way that Crosby and Bubbles rolled their eyes at each other, obviously having a conversation without needing words. He was going to treasure the way that Brady looked to himself and John as he laughed, the younger man having fallen into a sort of younger sibling role to himself and John lately.

He wasn't even going to begin to talk about all of the things that he'd treasure about John, or he knew that he'd never stop.

What he meant, was that it was nice to just spend some time with them, without having to worry in that particular moment that one of them might not come home from their next mission.

Eventually, after a couple of hours, another few rounds of drinks, and a conversation between John and Curt that had started with them both trying to tell their side of the story louder than the other, and had ended in raucous laughter from both, he figured that he'd call it a night.

He wanted to go meet their new C.O. in the morning, and he'd always liked to make a good impression when it came to the higher-ups. Sure, he wouldn't be hungover like he knew a lot of the guys would be, but he still wanted to be on his best form.

So, he leaned in to knock his shoulder against John's, drawing his attention, "I'm gonna call it a night." He said.

John nodded, draining the last of the whisky that he'd been nursing for the last few minutes, "I'll walk you back."

"You don't have to do that." He insisted.

"Nah, I'm gonna have a cigarette anyway." John said, patting down his pockets to find his cigarettes, "Just give me a minute to settle up at the bar."

He nodded, shrugging his shoulders. It wasn't that far back to the base, but he certainly wasn't opposed to the company, he just hadn't wanted John to feel like he had to walk him back. In saying that, he knew that John would probably do a U-turn and come straight back to the bar once he'd seen him back.

Once he'd said his goodbyes to the rest of the guys, he headed outside to wait for John while he settled up at the bar. He knew the other guys wouldn't think anything of the fact that John was walking him back, and so he didn't worry about it.

He shoved his hands into his pockets, kicking at a pebble on the pavement as he waited for John to come outside.

"Hey, there you are."

He glanced up to see Mike approaching him, and he only just resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He should've known, he probably should've waited inside with John.

"I'm heading back to base." He said, folding his arms as he glanced back at the door.

Mike shrugged, stumbling slightly as he walked over to him, "Want some company?"

He shook his head, "I've got some, my buddy is coming back with me." He insisted. He wasn't sure what it would take for this guy to get the hint, but he hoped the news that John was coming with him would be

enough.

Still, obviously Mike wasn't one to be deterred, and he laughed as he stepped in close to him, wrapping a hand around his forearm, "Come on, don't be like that." He said, pulling at him.

He pulled back, frowning as Mike's hand around his forearm only tightened, "Let go of me." He told him.

He wasn't worried about anything happening. If it came down to it, he knew that he could put Mike on the ground; he just didn't want it to go that far. He could handle himself, but he did like to hold himself to a certain standard, and he wasn't one for bar fights.

Mike just rolled his eyes, "Come on, I'm sure your friend will be fine. We'll go for a drink somewhere else."

"I told you, get your hands o-"

"*Hey*."

He looked over at the sound of John's voice; the sharp tone making him sound more like Major Egan than Bucky in that moment.

"It's alright, John." He insisted, attempting to twist his arm out of Mike's grip again.

John ignored him, holding himself at his full height as he stepped over to them. John was broad, and at his full six foot two height, he could be intimidating when he wanted to be, "I'm pretty sure he just told you to get your hands off him." He snapped.

Mike shook off the threat, turning his back to John, "Why don't you back off?"

"Why don't *you*?" John asked, his voice still hard.

Mike just rolled his eyes, clearly not intimidated by John's presence. Maybe he was just too drunk to realise how pissed John was, and how easily he could fly off the handle, "I don't see how this is any of your business."

"The hell it isn't." John snapped, shoving Mike back from him.

"John-"

"Alright, alright." Mike insisted, rolling his eyes as he held his hands

up, "Call off your damn guard dog." He said to Gale, before stepping back from him, "Fucking Yanks."

John stood just in front of him as Mike stalked back inside, and he could sense the anger still bristling at John.

"Hey." He said quietly, putting his hand on John's arm, "Come on, let's just go."

John just glanced back at him, and it was obvious that his hackles were still raised, "What the hell was that?" He asked.

He shook his head, shrugging his shoulders, "Nothing, just an asshole who doesn't know how to take no for an answer."

John nodded, seeming to deflate a little, before wrapping his arm around his shoulders, "Alright. You're okay, though?"

"Yeah, nothing to worry about." He insisted, leaning into John's side, "You make a hell of a guard dog." He teased, hoping to lighten the atmosphere a bit.

John just laughed softly, before leaning in to press a **kiss** to his hairline, holding him close for a moment.

There it was, that damn kissing him again. He hadn't forgotten about the last time, exactly, but since it hadn't happened since then, he'd figured that it was just a once off occurrence.

John smiled as he let him go, although there was something that looked almost soft about his smile; something that he couldn't quite put a name to. He wasn't about to try, though, because he knew that John was probably only drunk.

"Come on." John said with a grin, linking his arm through his as they started to walk, "Gotta get you home in time for your beauty sleep." He teased.

He just laughed, shaking his head as he let John lead him down the street.

Chapter 3: chapter three

3.

Stifling a yawn, he smiled as he glanced over in John's direction, watching as he dropped his head back against the pillow and groaned for what felt like the hundredth time.

"Why did I offer to do this?" John asked, craning his neck up to look back at him.

He just shrugged, "It was the right thing to do."

He and John had been holed up together in the officer's quarters for the last couple of hours, sitting on either end of John's rack as they'd worked through the thirty letters home to the families of the men that they'd lost on the mission yesterday.

This morning, he'd gotten up early enough in order to go see their new C.O., Colonel Harding. Most of the men had still been asleep by time he'd gotten up, which wasn't all too surprising, considering very few of them had made it back to the base by the time he'd actually gone to sleep last night.

He hadn't heard John coming in at all, but he'd woken up to use the bathroom shortly after oh-five-hundred and his rack had still been empty, and so he wasn't surprised to find him still snoring into his pillow when he'd gotten up.

His meeting with Harding hadn't been anything official, it was more of a chat than anything else; he'd just wanted to meet him properly before they got back into it. He seemed a nice guy, though, if a little tough. Still, it was what they needed from their C.O., and so he certainly had no complaints.

Harding had asked him about the other squadron commanders, although he was rather surprised at the interest he'd taken in John. He'd asked him what were his thoughts on John's leadership abilities, his flying skills. He hadn't thought much of it, though, and so he hadn't hesitated in saying that John was an excellent leader, and that he lead best as a squadron commander. That hadn't been a dig at John's abilities as Air Exec, it honestly hadn't, he was just being truthful.

Like he said, he hadn't thought a whole lot of it, and so he'd felt the slightest twinge of guilt when John had joined himself and Kidd at breakfast later that morning, with the news that he'd been demoted.

Still, John thankfully hadn't seemed too upset with his demotion. *You got up early this morning. You see Colonel Harding before me?* He'd asked to his surprise, before a grin crawled onto his face when he looked up at him, *Oh, I can read upside down, Buck.*

He should've known that he'd never be able to get anything past John, the older man was too sharp for that, even when he was hindered with a hangover. So, he'd just reassured John that he hadn't said anything other than the fact that he was a good leader, and that he lead best as a squadron commander.

Still, if he was being honest, he knew that John wasn't the best choice when it came to the job of Air Exec. He was too restless for an office job, too eager to be up there with the rest of them, doing his part. He couldn't even fault him for it, not when the unit would benefit from having John as a squadron commander.

He was almost surprised then, when John had said that he'd made one last request before being demoted, and that he'd asked to write the letters to the families of the guys they'd lost.

He knew he shouldn't have been, though. John was kind and compassionate, and he knew that it would mean more to the families if those letters came from him rather than Colonel Harding; who'd never even met the men that they'd lost.

It was a kind gesture, one that John didn't have to do, but had done anyway.

So, he'd offered to help him with the job, and that was where they had found themselves since then.

He was sat cross legged at the foot of John's rack, while John had sprawled on his back with his head on the pillow. His legs were bent at the knees to make room for Gale, although the rack was small enough that his socked feet still pressed up against his crossed legs.

He doubted it would have been an issue for him to sit on Turner's rack while they were busy writing the letters, since his own rack was a couple of spots over, but he didn't mind the idea of sitting cramped together on the same rack like this, and he knew that John didn't mind it either.

It almost reminded him of flight school, where he and John would sit for hours at a time, cramped onto the same bunk, studying together and quizzing each other. They were fond memories that he held onto, back before either he or John had climbed through the ranks, and back when they were still learning how to pilot B-17s. Back before there had ever been a war on.

Another thing that had almost surprised him about his and John's conversation earlier, was when John had moved on from his conversation with Harding and had said, *You know, uh.. if this whole thing ended, and there were only two pilots left up in the air.. It'd be me, and it'd be you, Buck.*

Don't count on it, he'd warned, a grin crawling onto John's face in response to his words, but honestly? He believed that too.

No matter what happened, he did firmly believe that it was himself and John against the world, and so it was nice to hear John repeat the same sentiment with just as much conviction.

Speaking of John; he groaned yet again, setting aside the letter he was in the middle of writing, before dropping his arm over his eyes, "I think we should take a break, I need to think about something else for a while."

He just smiled, looking up from his own letter, "Y'know, it would be a lot easier to do this if you weren't hungover." He pointed out.

"Shut up." John mumbled from underneath his arm.

He huffed out a soft breath of laughter, although he did set his own letter aside. He'd offered to help John with this, but it was a pretty heavy job. There were only so many times they could write *I'm sorry, but we don't know the fate of your son*, before it started to get to them. Maybe a break wouldn't be the worst idea in the world.

He turned his attention back to John then, smiling as he watched him. He still had his arm draped over his eyes, although that didn't hide the fact that he was sulking. It wasn't hard to see that his hangover had since set in.

He knew that John had a lot of vices that could be considered bad habits; the drinking, to mention just one of them.

In theory, he'd never really agreed with vices like that. Drinking, gambling, fighting; they were all bad habits that he'd been exposed to

by his dad at a far younger age than he should've been, and so he tended to stay away from them all now. He'd never judged John for it, though, and he never would. It wasn't up to him to decide how John got through each day.

In saying that, he couldn't quite resist the urge to tease John when he was feeling less than healthy after a night of drinking.

"Hey, actually-" John started after a moment, pushing himself up; not quite into a sitting position, but close enough to it, "Are you alright after what happened last night?"

He shrugged his shoulders, "I'm fine." He insisted, "Nothing actually happened."

He and John hadn't spoken about it last night, mainly because there wasn't a whole lot to actually discuss. Like he'd told John at the time, Mike had been nothing but an asshole who didn't know how to take no for an answer. He certainly hadn't been worried about it.

John just nodded, although he still looked faintly disgruntled about the whole thing.

"I mean it." He said, gently nudging John with his knee, "Even if anything had happened, I know how to take care of myself."

"I know, but still.. wasn't nice to see." John admitted, shrugging his shoulders.

He couldn't help but smile then, ducking his head slightly. John had always had a protective streak, and he'd been on the receiving end of that more than once. He certainly didn't feel like he needed John to protect him, though, and he hoped that John didn't think that he needed to. He was more than capable of taking care of himself.

"I meant what I said, though. You make a hell of a guard dog." He teased, hoping to lighten the mood a little bit.

John laughed, dropping his head back against the pillow again, "Only for you, baby." He said with a grin, lightly nudging him with his foot.

He shook his head, trying his best to hide his smile as he just watched John. There were shadows underneath his eyes that he knew were from the hangover, although there was another shadow beginning to bloom on his left cheekbone that looked more like a bruise.

He couldn't help but wonder where it had come from. John hadn't said anything about getting into a fight last night, although it wasn't unusual for that to be the case. John was loud and brash, and he knew how it could come across to people who didn't know him as well as he did.

Still, it didn't look like he'd actually gotten into a fight. It was a single bruise, which made him wonder if he'd been suckerpunched - also not that unusual of an occurrence, with John's attitude.

"What happened to your face?" He asked, unable to resist asking.

John looked back over at him, raising an eyebrow at his question, "Curt." He shrugged, dropping his head back against the pillow.

"Curt?" He asked, raising his eyebrows.

He was surprised to hear that. It went without saying that he and John came as a pair, but aside from him, Curt was probably John's closest friend in the unit. He wondered what the hell had happened last night that had lead to Curt landing a punch on John.

He didn't doubt that it would turn into a nasty enough bruise. Curt was short and rather unassuming, but he had a vicious right hook. He'd seen him put guys on the ground with a single punch before.

John huffed softly, shrugging his shoulders, "It wasn't like that." He insisted, "It's a long story, but it's fine. We're good."

"Alright." He figured he'd let it drop. Once John said that something was a long story, he knew there was no point in trying to pry it out of him.

For a moment longer, they sat in silence, and he half considered just going back to the letter; just for something to do, other than simply sit and look at John.

Like this, when it was just the two of them, and when John was being quiet and docile; it was hard not to let his mind wander, it was hard not to focus on just how beautiful John was. He couldn't help it, he'd never been able to help it when it came to John.

John's eyes were closed, his lashes just about brushing the tops of his cheeks. Like he'd noticed before, he looked tired, the shadows under his eyes betraying the fact that he'd had a late night. Despite that, though, and despite the very obvious hangover, John was still so

goddamn beautiful.

His face was angular; high cheekbones, sharp jawline, straight nose. With the way he was lying, though, his chin doubled up slightly, and there was something oddly vulnerable in it that made his heart flutter. He refused to let himself think too hard about that, though.

John stirred after a moment, something in his expression that he couldn't quite make out as he looked over at him, "Can I ask you something?" He asked, catching his lower lip between his teeth.

"You just did."

"Smartass." John huffed, rolling his eyes, "Last night, if that guy hadn't been such an asshole, would you have said yes?"

He was surprised at John's question, mainly because he'd thought that they'd moved on from that topic of conversation. John had asked him if he was okay, he'd insisted that he was fine, and that was that. There wasn't anything more to say on the subject; or so he'd thought.

So, he just shook his head, shrugging his shoulders, "No, obviously not."

"Well, say you weren't with Marge. You wouldn't have been tempted?" John asked.

He wasn't quite sure what to make of John's interrogation here. Obviously he wouldn't have been tempted, regardless of whether he was or wasn't with Marge. Honestly, he hadn't even taken a second to acknowledge whether Mike had been attractive or not, because he knew that it was something he wasn't interested in.

"I- no, of course not." He insisted, "What's this about?"

"Nothing." John conceded, holding his hands up, "I'm just saying. We're gonna be over here a long time, I don't think anyone'll judge you for how you.. take the edge off, I guess."

He could feel his cheeks flushing as he looked at John, and he quickly dropped his gaze just so he wouldn't have to see whatever it was that was on his face, "No, that's.. I wouldn't-"

He had no idea what he was supposed to say to that. Sure, Mike had obviously taken an interest in him last night, but he certainly hadn't given any indication that he'd be open to whatever it was that he'd

wanted from him, and so he really wasn't sure why John suddenly thought he would be.

He knew that this was veering into dangerous territory, and so he didn't even know how to have this conversation with John. Realistically, he knew that the only man he might ever be interested in was John himself. He certainly couldn't say that, though, and so he just.. he wanted to nip this conversation in the bud before it really started.

"Alright, alright." John said, shrugging his shoulders, "I'm not saying anything, I'm just-"

"It sounds a hell of a lot like you're saying something."

"I'm not." John insisted.

For a moment, they just looked at each other, and he could almost feel the tension in the air. He wasn't angry, he was just.. taken aback. He wasn't sure where John's train of thought had come from, or where it was going, and he was almost afraid of revealing something to John that he shouldn't.

John was the first one to break eye contact, sighing softly as he dropped his gaze, "Alright, never mind. Forget I said anything." He said, before pushing himself back up into a sitting position, "I'm starving, I need some chow before we get back to these letters."

John swung his legs off the side of the rack before standing. Rather than just heading for the door, though, he leaned down to press a **kiss** to the top of Gale's head, dropping a hand to the back of his neck as he did.

He couldn't help but lean into it slightly, before returning John's small smile with one of his own as he looked back up at him.

He knew there was no point in reading too much into it. This was the second time in as many days that John had kissed him for no reason, and honestly? He'd be lying if he tried to say that he had a problem with it.

He wasn't sure why John had suddenly started this habit, but he wasn't about to start asking questions about it either. If he drew attention to it, then John might stop, and so he was going to just.. keep his mouth shut.

"Come on, bike race to the mess?" John asked with a grin, glancing back over his shoulder as they headed for the door.

He huffed softly, shaking his head, "You're a child."

John just laughed, flashing him a bright smile.

Chapter 4: chapter four

4.

The medical hut was, well.. it had never been high up on his list of favourite places to be, but right now, he could think of few places that he hated quite as much.

Mostly, it was because he was pretty sure he didn't even need to be here at all.

They'd been out on a training mission that morning, working with some of the newer replacement crews that had come in recently. He didn't mind that aspect of the job; he knew that somebody had to train the new crews, and since a couple of them would be in his squadron, he was happy to be the one to do it.

As much as it did embarrass him whenever it was brought up, he knew that a lot of the younger guys looked up to him as a leader, and so he did make an effort to be warm and welcoming to the new crews.

He knew that it was daunting enough as it was, showing up as a replacement when the rest of the guys were already here and had been settled for weeks. They knew each other, they were friendly with each other, and he knew that some guys could be slightly bitter over the fact that the new guys were here to replace friends that they'd lost.

John was the same; he was loud, he was charming, and he knew that that encouraged a lot of the younger guys. He didn't tend to go out of his way to be overly welcoming, but he wasn't standoffish either, and that was enough sometimes.

But like he'd said, he'd been out on a training run this morning with the new guys, and everything had gone according to plan, for the most part.

The training hadn't even been anything crazy, they'd been practicing formations, and he'd been acting as command pilot; relaying orders and seeing how they responded, seeing how they got themselves into formation once he sent up a flare.

Overall, he'd been pretty pleased. Sure, they were new, but they'd all done their training and had come out the other side, and so there weren't any glaringly obvious mistakes that he was going to have to

bring up later. Maybe they'd need a bit of tightening up, but he knew that that was something that would happen naturally with time and practice.

It was only when they'd finished up and had come in to land that things had gone a bit haywire. As they'd descended down towards the runway, both of his left engines had stalled on him and so the fort had pulled sharply to the right just as they'd hit the runway. They'd landed awkwardly on the landing gear; balanced between the left wheel and the nose of the fort as they'd skidded to a grinding stop.

All things considered, it hadn't even been that bad of a crash landing. Aside from a few scrapes and bruises, nobody had been badly injured, and even their fort wasn't damaged that badly. The ground crew would have their work cut out for them, but he knew that they'd be back up and running in no time.

They hadn't had much time to brace themselves for a crash landing, though, and so he'd pulled his shoulder sharply when they'd hit the runway.

It wasn't the worst injury he'd ever had. If he was being honest, he barely even considered it an actual injury. Still, he'd flinched when the medical crew had been checking him over, an involuntary hiss escaping him when he'd moved his shoulder a little too much, and so they'd insisted that he spend the night in the medical hut, just to be safe.

He'd thought that they would have sent him on his way with a couple of pills for the pain, he certainly hadn't thought that they'd cart him off to the medical hut with orders to stay put until tomorrow. If he'd known that, he would have put on a brave face and not given any indication that he was in pain. Still, it was too late for that now, and so he'd have to just deal with it.

They had given him pills for it, although they were stronger than he'd been expecting. He'd only been here about an hour, and he was already fighting to keep his eyes open. At least the pain in his shoulder had mostly dulled, even if his head was swimming.

People had been coming and going throughout the afternoon, but if he was being honest, the faces had all started to blend into one once the pills had kicked in.

He vaguely remembered seeing DeMarco, and that the other man had laughed when he'd told him that he was a lucky bastard. DeMarco had

been co-piloting with him during the training run, and he'd somehow managed to walk away without a scratch. It was all luck, though, he supposed, same as any other mission.

For the last twenty minutes or so, he'd been dozing in and out of sleep, although he doubted that he'd manage to properly fall asleep. He'd spent a night or two in the hospital in his time, and it was always the same.

His attention was drawn by the sound of the door opening, and he glanced over to see John striding up the length of the hut, a worried looking frown on his face.

"Hey, Bucky." He mumbled, a smile crossing his face as he let his head loll back onto the pillow.

John huffed, his hands on his hips as he looked down at him, "You scared me half to death, you know that?"

He just shrugged, "I'm fine, see? Patched me up real good. Doesn't even hurt."

John finally smiled, moving to sit on the edge of the bed after a moment, "Yeah, I can see that." He said, leaning back on his hand, "Have they got you on drugs?"

"Oh, yeah." He said with a nod.

John laughed softly, and so he opened his eyes to look at him, giving him a lazy smile.

It was a thought that had crossed his mind countless times before now, but John really was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

He was wearing that God awful sheepskin jacket that he always wore, and his hair had come loose of its carefully gelled back style, a curl hanging down over his forehead that he wanted to comb his fingers through. He was smiling, but there was still that faintly worried looking line just between his eyebrows. Even so, though, he didn't think he'd ever seen anything quite as beautiful.

Maybe it was the drugs that were making his vision swim, but he couldn't help but think that there was something particularly lovely in the way that John was smiling at him.

He reached out for John, a smile crossing his face when the older man

understood what he was doing and let him take his hand.

He didn't usually encourage this kind of behaviour when it came to John. He'd never told him off for his inability to keep his hands to himself, and he wasn't even going to mention the kisses that he'd been planting on him lately, but he was never the first to initiate this kind of thing.

He'd always tried his best to keep himself at arms length, or something close to it; worried that John would pick up on his feelings if he let his guard down too much. Right now, though, he didn't particularly care. John was sat next to him looking unfairly pretty, and his judgement was clouded from the medication, and so he just.. he wanted to hold his hand.

John just smiled, gently squeezing his fingers.

"So, what actually happened up there?" John asked after a moment.

He took a moment longer to answer than he usually would have, his attention too focused on the feeling of John's hand in his own. He glanced up after a moment, though, wracking his brain for an answer, "I, uh.. we had a mechanical failure. Lost both left engines just as we came down on the runway."

"Well, nothing the ground crew can't handle, you'll be up and running in no time." John assured him.

"Do they need to see me at interrogation?" He asked, letting his head loll back against the pillow again. He'd been brought straight here once they'd landed, but he guessed that they'd probably need to talk to him at some point. Hopefully it wouldn't be any time soon, though, because he really didn't think he'd be any use right now.

John shook his head, "DeMarco is handling the after-action, you just focus on feeling better." He told him, giving him a small smile.

"I told you, I'm fine." He insisted, although he let his eyes slide shut.

John huffed softly, "Alright, alright. You're fine." He teased, something warm in his voice.

They lapsed into silence then, and he let himself drift off into a light doze. The medical hut was quiet and relatively warm, and John was rubbing gentle circles onto the back of his hand with his thumb. It was enough to make him want to drop off to sleep.

Eventually, though, he heard John sigh, and so he opened his eyes to look over at him, "What?"

"Nothing." John said, shaking his head, "Just.. you did scare me. I was stuck in a goddamn meeting, and I only heard that you'd gone down once I got out. They told me you were here, but I didn't know if you'd been hurt bad or not."

He sighed, gently squeezing John's fingers, "I'm sorry, didn't mean to scare you."

"Hey, you got nothing to apologise for." John insisted, ducking his head slightly in order to catch his eye.

He just nodded, although he couldn't help the slow smile that crawled onto his face as he looked back at John. Like this, the light coming through the window was just catching John's face, making his eyes look even bluer than they were. It reminded him of one of his favourite parts of flying, although that was something that he'd always kept to himself.

"What're you smiling at?" John asked, a faint smile tugging at his own lips.

"Just thinking about something."

"And what's that?" John asked.

He hummed quietly, "You know when you're out on an early morning mission, and it's not really bright out yet? Just before the sun properly comes up and the sky turns orange, there's a couple of minutes where the sky is this.. dark blue colour. That's one of my favourite things about flying."

John just smiled at him, "Yeah? How come?"

"It's the same colour as your eyes."

He'd never planned on admitting that to John, not in a million years. His judgement was clouded right now, though, and the way John was looking at him wasn't helping at all. Maybe it was just that he was a little fuzzy, but there was something that felt incredibly tender about this moment right here, and then there was the fact that John was still holding his hand.

It made him want to bare a little bit of his soul to John; just for a little

while.

John's cheeks flushed at his admission, and he quickly ducked his head in an attempt to hide his smile, "Come on, you don't mean that."

"I do, never meant anything more." He insisted.

If he'd been thinking straight, he would have known how stupid it was for him to admit something like that. He'd never intended on revealing how he actually felt about John to anybody, much less to John himself. He really didn't care right now, though. He wanted John to keep holding his hand, he wanted to hold onto this moment for as long as he could.

John just looked at him, that pretty flush still on his cheeks, "Doesn't sound like something you'd be noticing." He said softly, although he gently stroked his thumb over the back of his hand again.

He nodded, "I noticed. I look for it every time we're up there on an early flight."

For once, it looked as though John was lost for words. He couldn't remember the last time that that had happened, and certainly not because of something that he'd said.

"Cat got your tongue?" He asked, a faint smile pulling at his lips.

John huffed softly, looking down at where their hands were still linked together, "Just surprised, is all." He admitted, "You're not usually one for sweet talking."

He hummed, giving John a lazy smile, "I'd sweet talk you, just don't usually know how."

John was quiet again then, and he couldn't help but wonder if he'd crossed a line. Even if he had, though, he couldn't find it in himself to care right now. His thoughts were fuzzy, his judgement clouded, and John was sat next to him looking incredibly beautiful. Maybe he should shut the hell up before he ended up saying anything more incriminating, but John's hand in his own was making him want to spill everything he'd ever thought about the older man.

"Buck.." John eventually said, a faintly torn look crossing his face.

"Not my name, and you know it." He teased, gently pulling on John's hand.

John just looked at him, biting his lip gently, "Gale, then." He said softly, his real name sounding unfamiliar coming from John's lips, "You should go back to sleep, before you say something you don't mean."

He sighed, letting his head drop back against the pillow again, "I told you, I mean it."

"I know, but you'll wish you hadn't said it in the morning." John said softly.

Realistically, he knew that John was right. Not because he hadn't meant what he'd said; he'd meant every word of it. He just hadn't ever planned on saying anything like this to John. He'd long since accepted his feelings for the older man, but that didn't mean that he'd ever planned on letting John know about it.

Still, there was something almost sad in John's voice as he spoke, and he didn't quite know what to do with that. It almost felt like he wished that Gale wouldn't regret his words in the morning.

That didn't make a whole lot of sense to him, though. Aside from Marge, John was probably the person that he was closest to in his life, but he was almost entirely sure that his feelings for John were completely one-sided. He'd never had any indication that John might feel the same way about him, despite how close they were, and so he didn't quite understand why John would be upset about him taking back what he'd said.

Still, he nodded, "Yeah, I should probably sleep." He agreed. He knew that John was right, and so there was no use in arguing.

John just smiled softly at him, reaching over to brush his hair back from his forehead. He leaned down after a moment, pressing his lips against his forehead in a soft **kiss**.

He couldn't help but lean up into it, closing his eyes. The kiss wasn't quick and fleeting like he'd expected it to be; John lingered with his lips pressed against his skin for a moment longer than he'd thought he would, and so he reached up to wrap his hand around the back of John's neck, holding him where he was.

"John.." He whispered, pressing his fingers down against the warm skin of John's neck.

"I know." John said softly, speaking the words against his skin. He

pulled back after a moment, giving him a small smile, although there was something about it that he couldn't quite figure out.

He just looked up at John, letting himself focus on nothing more than the warmth in John's eyes as he looked back down at him, "You don't have to go yet, do you?"

John shook his head, "I can stay for a while longer."

He nodded, although rather than simply settling down against the pillow again, he moved over as well as he could, nodding towards the space that he'd left next to himself.

Thankfully, John understood what he was asking, without making him actually say the words, and so he moved until he was sat next to him, their shoulders pressed together, "This alright?" He asked.

"Yeah, more than alright." He murmured, letting his head drop against John's shoulder.

John huffed softly, leaning his own head against the top of his.

Maybe John was right, maybe he'd think back on this later and wish that he'd kept his mouth shut. He couldn't find it in himself to care right now, though, not when John was being so sweet and giving him what he was asking for.

He was warm and comfortable with John pressed against his side, and he could feel sleep slowly starting to pull at him again; and so all he wanted right now was to give in to that and let John's soothing presence lull him back to sleep.

Chapter 5: chapter five

5.

"Buck, will you please do something about that?"

"I'm staying out of it." He said with a grin to DeMarco, before turning his attention back to watching John.

He'd spent the evening down in the officer's club with a few of the other guys that evening. It hadn't been anything wild; a few drinks, a few laughs. It had been to spend time with the guys more than anything else.

They were awaiting their orders for the next mission, and he knew that some of the guys were starting to get antsy. He couldn't blame them, but he was trying not to do the same. Their orders would come when they came, and there really wasn't much they could do about it.

So, they'd congregated down in the officer's club for the evening, and while it had been a relatively quiet evening, that hadn't stopped John from making himself the center of attention, as he usually did.

As of right now, John was weaving his way around the dance floor, singing an off-key version of *Lili Marlene* along with the band. It wouldn't have been so bad if John had actually been blessed with a decent singing voice, but the older man unfortunately couldn't hold a note to save his life. John had always insisted that that didn't matter, though, and that the important thing was that he committed with enough enthusiasm to be convincing.

Still, he knew that the other guys didn't actually mind. Kidd and Veal kept shooting him dark looks, as though he should have been able to reign John in, but he wasn't about to even try. He could see that John's antics were amusing most of the guys, and so he'd leave him to it.

John kept shooting him glances, though, a grin on his face as he sang into the microphone, and he almost didn't know what to do with it.

He and John hadn't spoken about that afternoon a couple of days ago, when he'd been in the medical hut.

He'd woken up later that evening to find himself alone, John

obviously having stepped out while he was sleeping. While checking him over, Smokey had told him that John had been called away, and that he'd said he'd come check in with him later. He didn't mind, he knew that John had duties, and so he wasn't about to be pissed at the fact that he'd left while he was sleeping. Still, it was nice that he'd told Smokey to let him know where he'd gone.

Since then, he'd tried his best not to let himself think of his and John's conversation that afternoon, when he'd been feeling the effects of the pills they'd given him. He didn't regret what he'd said, not in the slightest, but he couldn't help the embarrassment he felt every time he thought about it.

He hadn't outwardly said that he had feelings for John, but the subtext was definitely there, and John was sharp as a tack. He'd never needed things to be spelled out for him, and so he was almost sure that he'd picked up on it.

John hadn't said anything either, but it was impossible to miss the fleeting glances that he kept sending in his direction, as though he was waiting for him to break the ice and be the first to bring it up.

Part of him wondered if he should just get it over and done with, but he was almost afraid of what John would say if he initiated that conversation. He doubted that he'd be angry with him, or that he'd try and push him away because of the way he felt, but he just.. there was the tiniest part of him that worried about the possibility of John feeling the same way; and it was a possibility that suddenly didn't seem so unrealistic.

He'd long since accepted his feelings for John, but there was a difference between quietly loving John from afar, and having something actually happen between them.

It wasn't that he didn't want that, of course he did, but there was never any question about the fact that he was going to marry Marge and having something happen between himself and John would only complicate everything. He'd never planned on saying anything to John, or making his feelings known, and so it was probably for the best that they swept it under the rug and pretend that he hadn't said anything.

He was trying his best not to think too hard about it right now, though. Thankfully, it was easy enough when John's full attention wasn't focused on him, when he was too busy acting up in front of the

rest of the guys in order to draw laughter from them.

Like he'd said before, John couldn't hold a decent note to save his life, but that had never deterred him from getting up and singing. It wasn't hard to see that Kidd wasn't amused, but he couldn't even pretend to feel the same way. John had always known just how to make him laugh, and this was no different. Watching John shimmying and strutting his way around the dance floor, crooning badly into the microphone; it was always guaranteed to bring a smile to his face.

Crank laughed, shaking his head as John twirled along with the song, "Y'know, Buck, if you're not gonna stop him, you could at least get up and dance with him so he stops looking over here."

"Why don't *you* go dance with him?" He teased, taking a drink from his glass in order to hide the way his cheeks flushed.

He wasn't about to get up and dance with John in front of everybody. Sure, it was no secret that he and John were pretty much joined at the hip, but there was being close, and then there was doing something that could raise a couple of questions, and he had no intention of putting himself in that position.

With the barely there tension between himself and John over the last couple of days, the last thing he needed was to complicate things even further by asking him for a dance in front of everybody.

"It's not me he's making eyes at." Crank teased, rolling his eyes.

He just smiled, shaking his head.

Obviously he'd noticed the way that John kept looking over at him, but he hadn't thought that the other guys had noticed it too; he'd thought he was just aware of it because of what had happened the other day. Still, he was sure that nobody was reading too much into it. It wasn't like John flirting with him was anything out of the ordinary, and so he wasn't about to make it into something that it wasn't.

Thankfully, he managed to avoid catching John's eye again until the song ended, and John laughed as he flung himself back down into the seat just next to him.

"Y'know." He teased, handing John's half empty glass of whisky back to him, "You don't have to get up and sing every time that we're here."

"Ah, where's the fun in that?" John asked with a grin, finishing off the last of his drink.

He went back to his own drink, although he couldn't help but smile as he watched John from the corner of his eye.

There was a flush on the older man's cheeks; which he assumed was both from the alcohol he'd been drinking, and the exertion from the way he'd been dancing around the hall. It suited him, a healthy glow had always looked good on John, and this instance was no different.

Then, there was the warm, easy way that John smiled. He'd always been quick to it, even more so when he had a couple of drinks under his belt.

Like he'd said before, drinking wasn't a vice that he generally agreed with, but he wasn't about to start lecturing John on his methods of getting through the day. Besides, John had never been a nasty drunk, not like his father had been, and so he'd never felt the need to distance himself from the older man when he'd been drinking.

"I think you should get up and sing." John said after a moment, turning his attention away from Brady's and Blakely's conversation that he'd been listening to.

"Not gonna happen." He insisted.

John rolled his eyes, "Oh, come on. I know you can sing."

"Doesn't mean I want to." He pointed out, although he let a smile crawl onto his face.

John just smiled back, before huffing and shaking his head, "I'll get you up there some day, you mark my words." He said with a grin.

"Whatever gets you through the day."

He would admit that his singing voice wasn't actually that bad, but he didn't have the confidence that John did, and so he wasn't about to get up in front of everybody and sing the way that John had.

Thankfully, John didn't actually push the suggestion, and they settled back into conversation with the rest of the guys.

He wasn't a drinker, but it was nice to spend some time with the guys when they could focus on something other than the next mission.

Sure, he knew that it was on a lot of their minds, but nobody had said much about it, and so he was happy to think about something else for a while.

He wasn't naive, he knew that every time they spent together could be the last time, and so he made sure to take the time to enjoy it while he still could. It broke his heart to look around here tonight and think of who might not be here after their next mission, but he knew that he couldn't let himself dwell too deeply on that possibility.

Eventually, he turned his attention away from DeMarco, glancing back towards the door of the officer's club, "I'll be back in a minute, just gonna get some air." He said, clapping the other man on the shoulder as he rose to his feet.

He wasn't planning on skipping out just yet, but the warmth of the hall was starting to feel a little bit stifling in his uniform, and so he was just heading out for a minute to get some fresh air.

He didn't go far, stopping just around the side of the hall, a little bit further down from the door.

He could still hear the music from here, but he couldn't make out any of the conversations that were still going on in his absense. He was glad that, in general, the guys all got along as well as they did. When they were up in their forts, one of the most important things was knowing that you could rely on the other nine guys that you were up there with.

It was a hell of a way of forming close knit friendships.

Pulling out a toothpick, he'd only just slid it in between his teeth when he noticed movement from the corner of his eye, and he glanced over to see John approaching him, "Hey."

"Hey, thought you'd skipped out." John said with a smile, patting his pockets down for a moment before retrieving a packet of cigarettes.

He shook his head, "Just getting some air."

They lapsed into silence then for a moment as John lit his cigarette, and he watched as John tipped his head back for a moment in order to exhale the smoke. As he did, he noticed the faint mark just underneath the curve of John's jaw, which he guessed was an almost faded lovebite, and he couldn't help the wave of jealousy that rose in him at the sight of it.

He knew he had no right to feel jealous over John being with somebody else, but he just.. he couldn't help it.

"You having a good night?" John asked after a moment, drawing his attention again.

He nodded, "Yeah, it's nice to spend some time with the guys."

He'd never been one to throw himself right into the conversation, but it was nice to sit back and watch the guys enjoying themselves. A lot of them were younger than himself, and so he did sometimes feel like an older brother that was taking care of the kids, and he knew that John felt the same. He certainly didn't mind it, though.

"Yeah, I get that." John said with a smile, before glancing back towards the still open door as the song changed into something a little slower, "Oh, I love this song."

"Yeah, me too." He agreed, glancing back towards the door of the hall.

His attention was drawn back to John when the older man held a hand out to him, and he raised an eyebrow as he looked back over at him, "What?"

"Dance with me."

He huffed, shaking his head, "Come on, John."

"I mean it, dance with me." John said with a grin, still holding his hand out to him.

"I-" He didn't know what to say, not having expected John to ask him to dance with him. It had caught him off guard, to say the least, "The other guys are just inside."

John shrugged, "So? I heard Crank telling you to dance with me earlier, they don't care." He reasoned, "Come on, one dance."

He sighed, finally letting himself take John's hand. He knew that this probably wasn't the best idea, but he couldn't find it in himself to resist when John was smiling at him like that.

John grinned, pulling him close by the hand, although he leaned down to press a quick **kiss** to his knuckles, before taking his hand properly in his own.

He could feel his cheeks flushing as he stepped in close to John, although the other man thankfully didn't draw any attention to it as he looped his other arm around him.

He fell into step with John as he slowly swayed them to the music, doing his best to look anywhere other than straight into John's eyes. He was almost afraid of what he'd see if he did, and he couldn't guarantee that he wouldn't do something that they wouldn't be able to come back from.

He had to admit, he was rather surprised at the fact that John was a decent dancer when he actually put his mind to it. Still, all they were doing was slowly swaying together to the music, and so there wasn't anything overly complicated about it.

It was really nice, though, he could admit that much. John's hand was warm in his own, and he could feel the way the muscles in his back moved as they swayed together. John had leaned in close enough that his hair just about brushed against his temple, and while that had spared him from having to look directly at John, it meant that he was suddenly faced with the warm, inviting scent of the other man, and it took everything in him not to lean even further into it.

He could have stayed here forever, if he was being honest.

"So-" John started after a moment, leaning back just far enough to look at him, "Scuttlebutt says that this next mission is gonna be a big one."

He was almost surprised at the change in topic of conversation, but John hadn't stopped swaying, and so neither did he, "Yeah? Who'd you hear that from?"

"Ah, a lady never tells her secrets." John teased, a grin crawling onto his face.

He smiled and rolled his eyes, "You are no lady."

"D'you wish I was?" John asked, the smile suddenly gone from his face, "Would it make *this* easier if I was?"

He didn't know what to say to that. He hadn't expected John to say anything at all about whatever this was, and he certainly hadn't expected him to be so outright about it.

"I don't know what you're talking about." He said, the shame curling

hot in his stomach as he dropped John's gaze. He knew he shouldn't do that, he knew he shouldn't sweep this under the rug, but he didn't know what else to do.

John just sighed, "Like hell you don't." He said softly, before shaking his head, "It doesn't matter, forget I said anything."

He closed his eyes as John leaned in close to him again, letting himself just focus on the feeling of John's hand in his own, and the warmth radiating from him.

"I'm sorry." He murmured, swallowing thickly.

He.. God, he wanted this so badly, but he knew he couldn't let himself have it. He was already so afraid of losing John, and that was without complicating things even further by letting anything happen between them.

John shook his head, leaning back to look at him again, "There's nothing to be sorry for, you hear that?" He insisted, a hard look on his face.

He just nodded, not trusting himself with words.

Thankfully, John didn't push the issue any further, choosing instead to simply press his forehead against his for a moment.

He closed his eyes, leaning into it. Like this, it would have been so easy to close the gap between them and press his lips against John's, but he knew he couldn't, and so he settled on simply savouring the closeness of John, and the way he was still holding him.

"Come on, we better get back." John said after a moment, giving him a smile as he leaned back from him again.

"Yeah, I guess so." He agreed, finally letting go of John. He did feel a touch of guilt over shutting John down like he just had, but what else was he supposed to do? Thankfully, John seemed to understand, and he didn't seem to be too put out by the whole thing.

They headed back up to the door, although John caught him by the wrist just before he stepped inside, "Hey." He said softly, "Look, I'll drop it, but I just.. it's not just you, you know that, right?"

He'd started to suspect as much, considering the way John had fallen into the habit of kissing him lately, as well as the way John had

seemed almost upset at the possibility of him regretting what he'd said that day in the medical hut, but he just.. he hadn't let himself believe it. It was easier if they just didn't acknowledge it.

"Yeah, I.. yeah." He said, mustering a small smile as he gave John's wrist a gentle squeeze in return. He was pretty sure they shouldn't talk about it, but this tiny acknowledgement could be enough for him if it was enough for John. He hoped it was.

John just smiled back, before dropping his wrist as they both headed back inside.

Chapter 6: chapter six

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Algeria was.. not what he'd expected.

Ahead of the mission to Regensburg, they'd been told that the 12th Air Force would be waiting in Algeria to welcome them with open arms and ice cold beers, and ready to house them until they could refuel and head back to England. Once they'd actually landed in Algeria, though, they'd found that the 12th weren't there at all, and that they were on their own.

Realistically, it wasn't the end of the world. They had enough food and water to keep them going for a few days, and it was warm enough that sleeping out by their forts wasn't an issue, but he knew that a lot of the guys were starting to lose patience with being stuck here.

He was trying not to let it get to him, but he had to admit that it was hard not to get frustrated.

The temperatures were almost unbearably hot during the day, even when they had stripped down to nothing but a pair of shorts. It wouldn't have been such a big deal if they'd had access to showers, but after three days of sitting around under the blazing sun, the lack of hygiene was starting to get to him. It was fine, it wouldn't be forever, it was just something that he wasn't fond of having to deal with.

Aside from that, the atmosphere within the unit hadn't been great either, to say the least.

That last mission had been brutal, and he knew that a lot of the guys were struggling to deal with the fallout. Even he could admit that he was struggling to deal with the amount of men that they'd lost.

Because of the weather, the brass had made the decision to send them up there alone, and the results had been.. disastrous. Rather than having three separate task forces to focus their attention on, the Luftwaffe had been able to target them, and them alone, and he couldn't even begin to count how many men they'd lost.

Curt, Claytor, Van Noy, their crews; they were only a couple of names on a very long list of guys that they'd lost that day. They didn't know

who'd been killed, who'd been captured, and he knew that it was weighing heavily on everybody's minds. Nobody had actually started a conversation about it, but it felt like the elephant in the room, and he knew that everybody was trying not to focus too hard on who wasn't here.

It was hard, though, and he could see that it was starting to get to a lot of the guys.

It seemed to be affecting John particularly badly, and it was something that he hated to see. Since they'd landed in Algeria, the older man had seemed to withdraw into himself, he'd become more reserved, and he really didn't know what he was supposed to do with that.

John had never been the kind of person to quietly sit back, and yet, that was exactly what he'd been doing over the last couple of days.

Right now, they were doing exactly the same thing that they'd been doing since they'd landed; sitting around their damaged forts, trying their best to keep themselves occupied. He was sat with Crosby and Douglass at his side, although he wasn't exactly listening to their conversation, he was too busy keeping an eye on John.

The older man was sat against the wheel of his own fort, his sunglasses perched on his nose as he read his book. Like the other guys, he'd stripped down to a pair of shorts and his white undershirt, the shirt already stained with dirt and sweat. He'd very much been keeping to himself that morning, and it was something that he was so unfamiliar with when it came to John.

He was used to John being loud and brash, he was used to him being a chatterbox. This new, quiet version of John was something that he didn't know what to do with, and honestly? It had him worried. They'd already lost so many men, they didn't need to lose John to grief too.

Over the last few days, things had been.. well, he didn't really know what to say about it. Since he and John had danced together outside the officer's club, and John had half admitted that he felt something for him in return, things had been pretty much the same as they'd always been.

John had been just as generous with his words and his gestures as ever, and he'd done his best not to read too deeply into any of it. Everything was exactly the same, and yet, it all felt so different. He

hadn't quite been able to wrap his head around the fact that his feelings weren't as one-sided as he'd always thought; even if he'd been suspecting as much.

He'd tried to push it to the back of his mind since they'd landed in Algeria, considering there were more important things to think about, but he couldn't help the way his mind had been wandering over the last few days.

That last mission had been the closest that he'd come to losing John since they'd first started flying in the war, and it had left him wondering.. what was the point?

John could have easily gone down on that last mission, and what would have happened then? If John had died, he knew he'd only live the rest of his life kicking himself for the fact that he and John had felt the same way about each other, and yet had done nothing about it.

All along, it had been easy to push down his feelings and pretend that they didn't exist, but a sudden realisation of both his own and John's mortality had made him feel like it wasn't such a huge and scary thing anymore. He was going to marry Marge, but he'd always been clear in his intentions to do so, and so he knew that John wouldn't try and get in the way of that, even if they did let their friendship become something more.

As he watched John, the older man put his book down, before standing so that he could climb up and into the belly of the fort he'd been sitting under.

It wasn't unusual for guys to seek solace in their forts, especially when they'd spent the last couple of days gathered together, and so he wasn't all too surprised that John was retreating for a bit of time to himself. In any other situation, he would have left him to it, but he couldn't deny that he was worried about John's mental wellbeing, and so maybe a quick chat with him wouldn't be the worst idea.

So, he dragged himself to his feet, leaving Crosby and Douglass to their own devices as he approached John's fort.

It only took him a moment to climb up and into the belly, and he glanced over to find John sat on the floor in the corner, his knees pulled up to his chest, "Hey." He said with a small smile.

"Hey." John said with a smile of his own, although it didn't quite reach

his eyes.

He made his way over to John, kicking shell casings out of the way before sitting next to the older man, their shoulders brushing together, "How you doing?"

John just shrugged, "Fine."

"You don't need to keep up appearances around me, John. You know that, right?"

He didn't see the point in beating around the bush here. If John wasn't doing as well as he liked to pretend, he wanted him to know that he could talk to him. Maybe he felt as though he needed to keep up appearances in front of the other guys, but he didn't have to do that with him, and he hoped that John knew that.

John looked at him for a moment longer, before dropping his gaze as he shrugged again, "What d'you want me to say?"

"I just want you to be honest with me." He said softly, "That mission was brutal, I don't think any of us are really okay after it."

"Are you?" John asked, looking back at him.

He sighed, letting his head drop back against the fuselage as he deliberated on how to answer that, "I don't know." He admitted, "I don't know what I'm supposed to feel.

"Same." John said softly.

He let his head roll slightly to the side, watching John. The older man wasn't looking at him anymore, instead focusing his gaze on a point of the fuselage that had been torn apart by bullets. He was wearing an expression that he didn't quite like the look of, although his attention was drawn more to the minor injuries on John's face; the cut on his cheekbone, and across the bridge of his nose. They were a stark reminder that John wasn't invincible, and that those injuries could have been a lot worse.

"Curt is dead, isn't he?" John asked after a moment of silence, although he didn't look back at him.

He sighed, letting himself look at John for a moment longer, before shrugging, "Yeah, I think so." He admitted.

He'd watched Curt's fort explode into a ball of flames, and while there had been chutes, the fort had been in a controlled glide until it had hit the ground. There was no way the plane had been unmanned, and so he was pretty sure it was safe to say that Curt was dead. He just didn't understand why he hadn't bailed when he had the chance.

John had tried to lighten the mood when they'd first landed, had said that Curt was probably off drinking a bottle of schnapps, but he knew that they were both just unwilling to acknowledge the reality of what had happened. John obviously hadn't seen Curt go down, and so he just.. he wanted to protect him from it for a little while longer.

John sighed, rubbing a shaky hand over his mouth, "I didn't think we'd lose so many." He admitted quietly, before lashing out and kicking a handful of shell casings away from himself, "They fucking sent us up there alone, knowing we'd be targeted."

"Hey, calm down." He said softly, finding John's hand with his own and giving his fingers a gentle squeeze, "I need you to hold it together."

He hated to see the change in John that had happened over the last couple of days. Even when they'd landed in Algeria, John had teased him about not making the runway, and he'd been so insistent over the fact that they'd get through this. He'd never imagined that it would only take a few days of reflection for John to fall apart, and he really didn't know what he was supposed to do to help.

"For what?" John asked, obviously still bristling with anger, "It's gonna be exactly the same the next time, and the time after that. We're just gonna keep losing guys, and for fucking what?"

"John, stop." He said, "We're doing the right thing by being here, and you know that just as well as I do."

He knew how hard this could be, God, he knew just how hard, but he didn't want John to start losing faith in himself, in the fight that they were fighting. He needed John to hold it together, and he really wasn't sure what to do if this ended up being the straw that broke the camels back.

John just looked back at him, his expression steeled into something neutral, although there were unshed tears shining in his eyes, "I thought you'd gone down." He admitted softly, "After we got through the other side of the shit and we were scattered all over the place.. I thought you were gone."

"I'm here, John." He said, squeezing John's fingers again.

John looked down at their joined hands, seemingly doing his best to blink away the tears while he wasn't looking right at him, "I know, but I just.. I don't know what I'd do if I ever lost you, Buck."

He reached up to cup John's cheek in his own, closing his eyes as he pressed their foreheads together, "You can't think like that, alright? You didn't lose me, I'm here."

He was just as terrified of losing John, but he knew that it wouldn't do any good to say that right now. It wasn't hard to see that John was hanging on by a thread, and so he knew that he just needed to reassure him of the fact that he was here; that he was safe, and alive, and that he wasn't leaving him. Maybe they'd both go down on their next mission, but right now? They were both still here, and that was the only thing that mattered.

John exhaled a shaky breath, his own eyes closed as he leaned his forehead against his. It felt as though they were teetering on the edge of something here, and while that should have terrified him, while it should have driven him away; he couldn't deny that it just felt right.

"Buck.." John whispered, his fingers trembling when he reached up to brush them against the line of his jaw.

"I'm here, I've got you." He whispered, before leaning in the rest of the way so that he could press his lips against John's in a soft **kiss**.

He knew he shouldn't have done that. Emotions were running high, and John seemed to be on the brink of tears, but he was so goddamn tired of trying to act like this wasn't what he wanted.

Thankfully, John opened up to it immediately, a soft noise spilling from his throat as he all but melted into the kiss.

He'd imagined kissing John before, of course he had, but God.. nothing he'd imagined could ever have lived up to the real thing.

He could feel the way that the older man was still trembling as he wrapped his arm around his shoulders to keep him close, still cupping his cheek in his other hand. He knew that he was probably trembling too, though, and so he didn't think much of it.

Sliding his fingers up and into John's hair, he couldn't help the way his stomach twisted when John whined softly as he dragged his

fingers through the dark curls. He'd file that information away for later, keep it for when they weren't in the belly of a fort, when they weren't hot, and uncomfortable, and dirty, and stricken with grief. This wasn't the time to be doing this, he knew that, but God.. he'd wanted it so badly.

Pulling back from the kiss, John sighed softly, keeping their foreheads pressed together, "God, Buck.. I-"

"I know, I know." He whispered, gently combing his fingers through John's hair again.

John leaned back just far enough to look at him, and that shattered look in his eyes had turned into something softer, something that looked a lot like affection, "What was that?" He asked.

He shook his head, "I'm just so goddamn tired of pretending that I don't feel anything for you."

"Why now, though?" John asked, and he looked almost frustrated with him for what had just happened.

"I could've lost you today, John." He whispered, hoping that John would just understand where he was coming from, "I couldn't live with myself if I'd lost you, knowing that we could've had this, and that I was just too afraid to let myself have it."

He hadn't planned on being quite that honest about it, but it was the truth. He and John could both die tomorrow, and so it seemed pointless to deny themselves something that they both obviously wanted. He wanted to treasure every moment with John that he could, in any way that they could.

John reached up to cup his cheek in his hand, gently stroking his thumb over the arch of his cheekbone, "I need you to mean this, Buck." He said quietly, something tight in his voice, "If you give me this, I can't forget about it. I can't pretend it didn't happen."

"I mean it." He promised, leaning in close to John again, close enough for them to breathe the same air.

Thankfully, that seemed to be enough of a reassurance for John, and he leaned in to kiss him again, still cupping his cheek in his hand.

Christ, this was.. it was all he'd ever wanted.

John's mouth was warm and wet as he parted his lips to meet his tongue with his own, and he couldn't help the soft moan that spilled from his throat as John pushed forward into the kiss.

He'd never kissed a man before, and while he'd imagined what it would be like to kiss John, he couldn't deny how different it was to kissing a woman. John was all sharp angles, and he could feel the prickle of his moustache against his skin as their lips slowly moved together. There was an assertiveness to John that he'd never experienced with a girl before, and it was something that he could honestly see himself getting lost in.

As they kissed, John slowly manoeuvred them around, using his weight to move them away from the back of the fuselage.

He went easily with it, letting John push them down until his back was to the floor, and John was hovering just over him. John wasn't resting his full weight on top of him, but it still felt so damn good to be surrounded by him in every sense of the word. John's knee was pressed between both of his own, and he was still cupping his face in one hand, the fingers of his other hand twisted into his hair.

He could hardly believe how easy it was to lose himself in this, to let himself focus on nothing but the taste and texture of John's mouth as their lips and tongues slowly slid together.

Pulling back from the kiss, John trailed his lips down over the curve of his jaw, letting his teeth scrape the sensitive skin of his throat.

"John.." He breathed, tipping his head back.

John didn't say anything, simply pressing their bodies together as he leaned up to press their lips together in another hard kiss.

"Wait, hang on-" He murmured against John's lips, combing his fingers through his hair again to get his attention.

"What?" John asked, leaning back just far enough to look down at him.

"I.." He started, before sighing softly, "I want this, I do, but.. not like this. Not here." He said, combing John's hair back from his forehead.

He couldn't even begin to say how badly he wanted this, how badly he wanted John, but he didn't want the first time to be here. The rest of the guys were just outside, there were empty shell casings digging into

his back, they were both sweaty and dirty. Then, there was the current state of John's mental wellbeing. He didn't want to be left feeling like he'd taken advantage of him.

Then, there was also the fact that he'd never even kissed a man before. If he and John were going to take this further than simply kissing, he wanted to mentally prepare himself for it first. Sleeping with a man was something he'd never imagined himself doing, even with John, and so it was a pretty huge step to take.

To his relief, John nodded, moving back to let him up, "You're right." He admitted, a faint smile pulling at his lips as he settled next to him.

"Yeah?" He asked, folding himself in next to John as they settled back against the side of the fuselage again.

It was nice to be able to do this, to be able to tuck himself in against John's side without worrying about how it would come across. It was the kind of thing that he'd always wanted to do, but had never let himself give in to the urge to do so before.

John nodded again, leaning down to gently brush his nose against his bare shoulder, "I want to wait until we can do it right." He murmured, speaking the words against his skin, "I want us to be in a bed, on leave somewhere. I want to take my time making love to you."

He could feel his cheeks flushing, although he didn't shy away from it, choosing instead to lean in so that he could lightly nudge his nose against John's, "Don't go getting my hopes up if you're not gonna deliver."

"Oh, I'll deliver. You can count on that." John teased.

He just smiled, letting his head drop back against the fuselage as he looked at John.

He was still concerned about how John was feeling, he wasn't about to pretend that he wasn't, but he just.. the sight of that soft smile on John's face did bring him a faint sense of relief. The last couple of days had been tough, though, and so he wasn't expecting everything to be completely fine.

Once John did his best to hold it together, and once he knew that he could talk to him when things got tough, then that was really all he could ask for. People were going to die, friends were going to die, that was inevitable, and so he just.. he needed John to stay strong.

He reached up to cup John's face between his hands again, stroking his thumb gently over his cheek, "We'll be alright." He said softly, giving him a small smile, "No matter what happens."

"Yeah, I know." John agreed. He covered his hand with his own, turning his head slightly so that he could press a quick kiss to the palm of his hand.

Rather than saying anything more, he simply leaned in to kiss John again, smiling into it when John wrapped his arms around him to pull him close.

They could figure out the details of this whole thing some other time. Right now, he wanted to focus on nothing more than the press of John's lips against his own, on the way John held him close, on the way John sighed softly into his mouth.

This had been a long time coming, and God.. he was so glad that they'd gotten here in the end.

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